

Life After Construction: Becoming an Independent Surveyor

Michael Thompson (AssocRICS)

Sava graduate and owner of
Survey Smart Ltd.



What was your background before training as a surveyor?

I've had a busy career in construction for the last 20 years where I've managed my own businesses and employed a workforce. I've worked on everything from new builds to renovations to churches, both on and off the tools, but it's a crazy life in construction – you're on decent money but it's very hard to escape.

What was your motivation for becoming a residential surveyor?

I was looking for improved work/life balance but in a profession where I could utilise my existing skills and knowledge. There's no switching off when you work in construction – it takes its toll on your mind and your body – and I needed a way out.

What made you choose Sava as your route into the profession?

I'd considered surveying about eight or nine years ago but could only see the university routes, which wouldn't allow me to keep earning. I found out about

Sava through my partner's best friend's husband who had completed the Sava diploma. I'd always assumed he'd gone to university to become a surveyor, so when I found out about Sava, I realised there was a door into the profession that was open to me.

The diploma enabled me to learn and make a career change while still earning, which was essential.

How did you find the training experience with Sava?

I enjoyed the course – particularly the trainers who were absolutely fantastic. They're really engaging and keep you interested throughout.

During the first year, we covered a lot of what I already knew from 20 years spent in building pathology and construction, so for me that part was a breeze. The assessment phase was a lot more challenging and, to complete it in my desired timeframe, I decided to take a couple of months off work to really sink my teeth into it. It helped that the Sava team were supportive throughout and were always there if you got stuck.

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What was the highlight of your Sava experience?

Passing the course for sure, but I also enjoyed the practical days in Milton Keynes where you visit the training properties with a practising surveyor. That was an eye-opener for me, enabling me to see how experienced surveyors approach a property inspection.

What have you been up to since qualifying?

My plan was always to work for myself because I've had experience running my own company and didn't want to go back to being employed.

I never felt like my knowledge was short on the course, so I felt very confident about setting up independently. I formed my company, Survey Smart Ltd before I completed the course – sorted company name, website and everything that comes along with it.

When I passed, I got in touch with friends and estate agents to find work and I now have two mortgage advisors and an estate agent who pass on instructions to me. This currently works out at about two surveys a week.

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With my background experience, I am confident carrying out Level 3 surveys and enjoy spending a couple of days getting the detail right.

I still do the odd building as well, which has helped while growing the business.

I'm very much at the beginning of my surveying career, but it's been highly successful so far. My Google reviews went live a few weeks ago and they've been great. I'm very confident that, come the summer, I'll be flat out.

What has been your career highlight so far?

The first survey I produced – doing it all for myself and feeling confident in the report. I now have a steady supply of survey work coming in and I'm really enjoying doing Level 3 surveys.

From 20 years in construction to independent surveyor (cont'd)

What advice would you give those thinking of becoming a surveyor?

Don't underestimate the workload involved in completing the diploma. You've really got to be strict with allocating time for the course and you've got to be motivated. If you're determined, don't delay your learning. Make sure you set time aside to chip away at it and you'll succeed.

You should also start networking as soon as possible because nothing beats gaining some real-life shadowing experience with a local surveyor.

Would you recommend the Sava diploma to others looking to enter the profession?

Yes, and I have. Two of my old colleagues are now on the course and I'm hoping one day I can employ them.

I would recommend Sava to anyone looking to break away from construction because it'll lead to a better work/life balance. You can use the knowledge you've built up in building pathology, so it's not as though you're starting again from scratch. There is so much value in everything you already know.

In a few words, can you describe the impact the Sava diploma has had on your life so far?

It's been life changing. Working as a surveyor is far less stressful than working in construction. I can find time between work to focus on family and with a baby on the way, knowing I'll be able to set some time aside is so important. The Sava diploma has offered me a completely different way of life. It almost doesn't feel like a job.

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Sava's
surveying
diploma

